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Politicization

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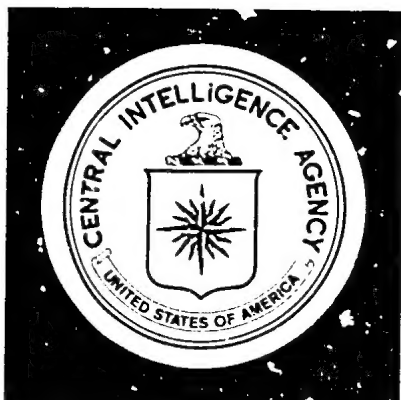
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Research Study

Politicization of International Technical Organizations

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August 1975

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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
OFFICE OF POLITICAL RESEARCH

August 1975

POLITICIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL
ORGANIZATIONS

STATINTL by



NOTE: This study was reviewed by representatives of other offices in the CIA and of other governmental agencies, but no attempt at formal coordination was made. For further information about this study, please call [REDACTED] code 143, x5441.

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INTRODUCTION AND KEY JUDGMENTS

The United States has experienced varying degrees of success and difficulty in achieving its goals within the United Nations system over the years. There is a growing perception, however, that during the past two years the actions of a coalition of the world's small states has made the maintenance of US interests in that body more difficult than ever. *Politicization* has become the standard term used by bureaucrats, journalists, congressmen, and academics to describe the wide spectrum of difficulties which the US now faces in international institutions. There has been particular concern that politicization has now spread from the General Assembly to the international technical and specialized organizations which the US has long valued as assemblies where the technical bases for broader international cooperation could be somewhat dispassionately established.

This study attempts to measure whether, and in what forms, politicization is increasing in these technical organizations, and what the consequences could be for US

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interests. Particular attention is given to establishing whether political issues have altered or interfered with the chartered mission and work of these agencies, and to sorting out any rising trends of political debate from the standard "noise level" of politics which is found in all international gatherings. This study also examines the meaning of politicization as seen by many of the US officials who must deal most directly with its manifestations and consequences.

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This study finds that despite a high level of political rhetoric, external political issues appear to have caused only minor damage to the substantive effectiveness of these organizations. The dichotomy between *rhetorical* and *substantive* politicization is rooted in the character and operating environment of the technical organizations as well as in the contradictory interests of the member-states. Thus, while the LDCs may find political speeches essential to a particular occasion, they are often either unwilling or unable to disrupt the functioning of these groups. This reflects in some cases their anticipation of benefits from the organizations, and in other cases their

lack of specific interest or technical competence in the matters at hand.

The low level of actual damage from politicization thus far also reflects the strong US position in these organizations -- especially the high caliber of its expertise and its good standing with the professional secretariats. Prospects are good that, by pursuing these advantages, the US can act to maintain the dichotomy and prevent any progression beyond rhetorical political activity in the technical organizations.

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**PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICIZATION
IN TECHNICAL ORGANIZATIONS
DERIVED FROM INTERVIEWS**

	TYPE OF POLITICIZATION	
	Rhetorical	Substantive
DEGREE OF POLITICIZATION	Low or None	WHO WMO IAEA ITU IMCO ICAO UNDP UNIDO FAO
	Moderate	ITU IMCO ICAO UNDP ILO
	High	ILO UNIDO FAO

A Note on Methodology

Because of the difficulty in obtaining current data on the UN system — and the international technical agencies in particular — the authors of this paper employed a variety of approaches to measure the existence and effects of politicization. Ten organizations believed to be representative of the highly diverse "UN family of organizations" were selected as the sample for this study:*

- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
- International Labour Organisation (ILO)
- Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
- Universal Postal Union (UPU)
- International Telecommunications Union (ITU)
- World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
- Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO)
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

** The major exclusion from the study sample has been the financial organizations. Their processes and functions were judged too different from the other bodies to permit a valid comparison of evidence concerning politicization.*

See the appendix for a descriptive chart of 17 technical organizations.

Both factual and impressionistic information about these organizations were gathered in a lengthy series of interviews with those officials in the various US government agencies who deal most directly with the major technical bodies. Generous contributions of time and expertise -- both in interviews and in commenting on a draft version of this paper -- were made by officials in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs of the Department of State; the departments of Agriculture, Labor, and Health, Education and Welfare; the Coast Guard; the Federal Aviation Administration; and the Energy Research and Development Administration.

The distinction made in this paper between rhetorical and substantive politicization was, in fact, a product of apparent contradictions which arose in the course of many of these interviews. Although many officials offered an initial impression that politicization was a serious problem in the organization with which they dealt, they were often unable, in follow-up questioning, to provide examples of changes in programming or budgeting which would indicate major disruption of the organization. This dichotomy -- relatively effective levels of substantive performance despite bitter rhetoric -- was confirmed in searches of the New York Times Data Bank and other reportorial archives for the public record of the meetings and programs of these bodies.

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The authors wish to express appreciation to [REDACTED] an OPR summer intern, for his contribution to the design and execution of the methodological approach to this study.

DISCUSSION

POLITICIZATION: THE PERCEPTION AND THE REALITY

All definitions tend to be self-serving, and the purposes of a study such as this make it inevitable that the use of the term *politicization* will be somewhat interpretive. The term derives from an assumption of the functionalist school among international relations specialists that the handling of "technical" matters among the world's disparate states can (and should) be carried out in isolation from discussion of contentious political issues which may exist among them. This appears, in fact, to have been part of the shared mind set of many of the representatives of the western powers who established the UN system. In this view -- allowing for some acceptable standard "noise level" of corridor politics -- any introduction or imposition of items extraneous to the purely technical matters on the agenda or program of an organization is *politicization*. In its most significant form, this phenomenon would involve the hindrance of an organization's normal functioning (and by extension the damaging of what the US perceives to be its interests and policies in a particular body). Thus the current interests of the US or

any other country will shape its view of what is "political" and what is properly technical.

RHETORICAL POLITICIZATION

By any measure, it is clear that both the political noise level and US awareness of it have risen markedly in international forums since the late 1960s. This is so because the number of participants has increased and because the US has become a principal target of the verbiage. In addition, the content of political debate in the UN system has changed: the somewhat familiar ideological differences of the old East-West confrontation have been replaced (or perhaps outshouted) by persistent and often shrill economic and social demands from an aggregation of small states. Many journalists have, somewhat hastily, described the verbal exchange between LDCs and the developed nations as the "new cold war."

In contrast, the pattern of expert opinion and other data gathered in this study points clearly to the conclusion that -- except for a few issue areas* -- the increasing imposition

* For example, in the ITU the developing countries are demanding that radio frequencies be allocated to all nations as a shared natural resource, regardless of any single nation's ability to utilize them. In many of the organizations the demand for an expanded executive group is resulting in greater LDC participation and influence in the inner councils of these groups.

of political demands has had little or no effect on the continued substantive functioning of the international technical bodies. Thus the politicization process in these bodies has so far been largely a rhetorical one. Nevertheless, the distinction between this and those fewer instances of substantive disruption of the organizations is worth making because of the widely-held belief that rhetoric is a precursor of concrete political action. In international (and especially UN) politics, the unchallenged repetition of certain demands or behavior *can* lead to their legitimization. But there are factors which indicate that the dynamics of the current political rhetoric do not fit past patterns. This and the nature of the organizations themselves would indicate a need to refrain from categorizing all instances of political rhetoric in the UN system as part of a uniformly threatening situation.

It is quite easy to impose a political or otherwise unconventional question upon the established routine of an international organization, since any member usually is granted the right of submitting an item for discussion. And given the sometimes dry and technical nature of routine discussion in these bodies, a political dispute is guaranteed to be a highly visible and audible affair for the participants.

Such action can take many forms: extraneous declarations of condemnations are urged for passage; questionable groups are sponsored for member or observer status; attempts might be made to expel or suspend a member. In large part because of the ease with which it can be undertaken, the rising frequency of political rhetoric gives no real measure of its impact.

It should also be recognized that the new states of the international system generally do not share the attitude of the UN's founding members toward technical bodies. They tend to view *all* multinational forums as potential platforms which can place them and their interests before a worldwide audience. Also, the segregation of technical from political matters is not yet part of the pattern of conducting domestic affairs in many LDCs; their political and economic systems often have not achieved a sufficiently high degree of administrative specificity to require such distinctions. In this respect, their behavior in international bodies should be seen as more natural than calculated.

Bloc politics -- the most visible tactical aspect of the current politicization -- is not the same phenomenon in this case that the US has faced in the past with the USSR and other Communist countries. In general, the LDCs are a bloc

by default of other power sources, and should not necessarily be viewed as "ganging up" by design on the developed nations. It is often simply their way of pursuing individual interests and certainly makes the rhetoric more visible that it would be if practiced piecemeal. Furthermore, most of the new LDCs entered the international system with no tradition of the sovereign conduct of foreign relations, and quickly found group participation to be the most natural way of articulating the obviously small share of power they held. This has often been disconcerting to those states which have ordered their diplomatic relations primarily on a bilateral basis.

Finally, it must be emphasized that carrying out protracted political debate in a technical organization is generally a different and far less fruitful undertaking than is the case in other international gatherings. Each of these bodies has a charter which sets its functional limits, and thus a full constitutional change would be required to alter its mission to respond to any substantially different needs and wants on the part of LDCs. Representatives from developed nations to the meetings of many organizations are frequently technical experts -- often uninstructed in diplomacy or their government's official

policy -- who are simply not inclined to discuss what they consider extraneous issues. In contrast, most LDCs cannot afford to staff a delegation to each agency, so their representative is often a diplomatic official who though politically sophisticated is over his head in substantive discussion. Furthermore, procedural controls over debate and the agenda itself, by both the professional secretariat staff and the older member-states, can channel discussion and preclude uncontrolled debate. In addition, most agencies have a tradition of consensual decisionmaking, which is inimical to the confrontation of up-or-down voting usually demanded on political issues.

SUBSTANTIVE POLITICIZATION

Much of the concern over rising levels of rhetorical politicization has been based on an assumption that where words are hostile, so are actions. It is often assumed that under such conditions, these organizations would be either less able or less willing to serve US needs. This has been the case in the UN General Assembly where increasing verbal abuse has, in fact, been associated with mounting defeats when matters come to a vote. Information collected in these interviews and from the organizations' records suggest this association has not been carried over into the specialized agencies.

With only one exception (the ILO), substantive politicization appears to have remained low regardless of the level of rhetorical politicization.* While ineffectiveness and conflicts with US policies certainly do exist, they are not directly attributable in any significant degree to politicization. In response to questions concerning agendas, budgets, programs, technical coordination, and information collection, US representatives' answers indicated no significant reduction of those services valuable to US interests.** Most of those interviewed recalled only occasional incidents where rhetorical politicization had seriously impeded technical work and noted that verbal hostilities generally did not affect substance. These observations were confirmed by the records of the organizations. Little change has been noted in programs important to the US during the past

* See chart following p.3.

** The rhetorical and substantive politicization distinction was developed from this apparent discrepancy -- interviewees' initial assessment of advanced politicization in their organization compared with later assertions that substantive output had not changed. The discrepancy seemed best explained by dividing politicization into two sub-categories. As discussed above, this distinction not only seemed necessary to understand the results of the interviews but was also supported by objective data drawn from records and press reports.

several years of increasing rhetorical attacks. Some organizations, such as IMCO, have slightly enlarged their services, which are valuable primarily to industrialized states. Where technical assistance programs for LDCs have been added or increased, they have been financed through additional funds and have not displaced basic services. Both sets of evidence indicate that these organizations are performing their technical functions and serving US interests at normal levels -- which vary widely among organizations -- regardless of levels of rhetorical politicization.

Levels of substantive politicization have also remained low despite the varying lengths of time that these organizations have been subject to rhetorical politicization. Although this does not mean that the distinction between rhetorical and substantive politicization will necessarily continue, it does suggest that substantive politicization is not a simple product of rhetorical politicization. The linkage seems equally tenuous in reverse: in the few cases where rhetorical excesses were perceived to have diminished in recent years (the ITU and WHO), there was no noted regression in whatever low levels of substantive politicization existed. It is also

interesting to note that the one case of substantive politicization, the International Labour Organisation -- where both State Department and Labor Department officials perceived a moderate degree of substantive politicization -- was not attributed to developed countries/less developed countries animosities, but to tensions between democratic and socialist ideologies.*

Most of those interviewed noted that increasing levels of rhetorical friction did consume valuable conference time allotted to substantive business. Even for those organizations where rhetorical politicization was characterized as moderate (ITU, IMCO, ICAO, and UNDP) or high (UNIDO, FAO), however, the officers did not see this displacement as a serious impediment to the work of the organization. Agenda planning and adherence have clearly become more difficult; but those interviewed felt that they -- with the assistance of sympathetic secretariat officials and chairmen -- could still exert sufficient influence to insure that business in which the US has interests is completed.

* *Since US substantive interests and goals in this organization are quite diffuse, assessment of impediments to those interests and goals is, at best, tenuous. The ILO is interesting, however, as an organization in which LDCs have taken few strong stands and US proposals (both formal and informal) have met opposition largely from Soviet members and from West European socialists.*

In many cases, rhetorical assaults have become institutionalized: the same speech is made by the same delegate year after year and time is duly allotted for the expected interruptions. In WHO, conference speeches on Israeli intransigence by Arab members and on the status of Puerto Rico by Cuban representatives are an expected annual event. In one conference, where debates on political issues such as Israeli/Arab affairs were predictable, the last two conference days -- after substantive business had been completed -- were reserved for this discussion. This insured that uninterrupted time would be available for technical business and helped to insulate technical decision-making from political tensions. The effectiveness of such maneuvers led most of the interviewees to conclude that the time factor of politicization is at present far more an inconvenience than a threat to substantive work.

Other explanations for continued US influence in the substantive work of these agencies are strong US relations with secretariat officers, the technical expertise of delegations, and the comparative lack of LDC involvement in technical substance of most of these organizations.

Perhaps the most important aid to insuring the uninterrupted conduct of these organizations' substantive

business is the quality of US relations with key members of the secretariat. In most organizations the secretariat is the originating point for agenda planning; if the US is to exercise influence towards minimizing time lost to rhetorical assaults and insulating substantive considerations from such disruptions, close ties with the secretariat are vital. As with the weight of US expertise in conference delegations, able and long-term US appointees in agency secretariats greatly increase US substantive influence.

In those organizations which are primarily conduits of aid and assistance, self-interests are a major restraint upon LDCs' moving from rhetorical battles into substantive battles. UNDP, FAO, UNIDO have all been protected from extended substantive disruption because LDC majorities clearly prefer that business be completed and their programs executed.*

* UNIDO may become the first exception to this generality if its structural changes and conversion to independent organization and Specialized Agency status -- which is a result of LDC pressures for institutional reforms that they believe will give them greater control -- diminishes its capacity to execute assistance programs through loss of financial support from developed countries. The results of its re-organization will not be apparent, however, for two or three years.

This principle of LDC restraint by direct self-interest also applies to various bodies within organizations. Several interviewees noted, for example, that LDCs intercede with political speeches far less frequently in committees concerned directly with assistance programs than those concerned with matters such as statistics collection.

Other technical organizations, however, serve primarily the major developed powers which have global communications and transport industries. Although ICAO, IMCO, ITU, and WMO have acquired technical assistance programs, the main burden of their activities is still regulation, coordination, and collection of information which chiefly is of value to states with large commercial interests in these fields. In these cases the complexity of these technical subjects and the weight of US expertise insulates the substantive from the rhetorical. LDCs lack the staffing and information to oppose positions on topics such as the fine points of new shipping and air transport regulations. Federal regulations devised in the US to coordinate interstate commerce and communication have served worldwide as models for international regulations in these fields. Compared to industrialized states, LDCs have relatively small interests in the details of these regulatory agreements and little motivation for opposing US policies on these issues. Most of the opposition the US meets in such organizations is, in fact, from other developed countries and derived from substantive rather than political differences.

Within the narrow confines of the substantive deliberations of these technical organizations, then, the

US enjoys not only technical advantages, but also a surprising capacity to insulate them from its mounting ideological liabilities. This insulation is, however, the product of these organizations' particular atmosphere and subject matter. It does not appear to be the case in other international bodies. Just as the assumption that the General Assembly's pattern of substantive losses following close upon rhetorical losses has been found not to apply to these specialized organizations, so their separation of rhetorical and substantive matters is not feasible to the same degree in other UN entities.

THE POLITICS OF TECHNICAL ORGANIZATIONS

The reality of politicization in the technical organizations has remained uniquely low, but its perception has not. The apparent impact of politicization has been greatly magnified beyond its real dimensions by two primary factors: the suddenness and consistency with which the US lately has found itself in a minority position; and the contrast with a brief preceding period of unusually low politicization in the mid and late 1960s.

During the immediate post-World War II period, the rhetorical politicization accompanying the Cold War was far more pronounced than at present. Substantive politicization

also seems to have reached a higher level, with much greater paralysis of international technical work, during those East-West confrontations. Yet few western representatives, scholars, and journalists expressed concern then over the political nature of these battles which the US, with its majority backing, often won. Current concern is at least as much a result of the US minority position as of the intrusion of politics upon technical bodies.

The current period was preceded by a phase of unusually low political controversy in these organizations. Between the de-emphasis of Cold War competition in multilateral forums and the rise in numbers and consciousness of non-aligned states (which came slightly later here than in the General Assembly), there was a short period during the 1960s when these agencies came closer than ever before to approximating the functionalist ideal of apolitical deliberations. This period was an aberration, not a norm. The current acceleration of political controversies in these forums, thus, is perhaps best seen as a return to normal conditions. It seems more natural that the tensions of "high politics" seep down to these technical bodies than that cooperation born of technical coordination will carry over into those bodies dealing primarily with foreign policy matters.

There appears, however, to be sufficient room in these bodies for both political controversy and technical functions -- as long as sufficient distinction is made between the rhetorical and substantive manifestations of politics. It seems clear that these organizations do not have to be essentially apolitical -- and they are not likely to be -- in order to achieve their prescribed work and to serve US technical needs and interests.

Under present conditions, the only foreseeable threat to US technical needs and interests would be a conscious and concerted effort by LDCs to break down this rhetorical/substantive distinction and to hold substantive decision-making hostage to political goals. Such a strategy -- especially in those organizations which primarily serve industrial powers -- could be quite effective given LDCs' conference majorities and their increasing representation on governing bodies. It would also be consistent with non-aligned ideology which has recently turned from demanding a greater share of the world's wealth to demanding a new system of allocating that wealth. A campaign to gain approval in these organizations for a point of non-aligned dogma, such as the New International Economic Order, could challenge the US substantive advantages.

Thus far, however, the LDCs have not tended to use votes on technical subjects as leverage for unrelated political concessions. Until such developments emerge, the strength of US positions on substantive issues -- compared to its liabilities in rhetorical battles -- warrants encouragement of continued separation of rhetorical and substantive contests.

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY OF
ORGANIZATION ABBREVIATIONS

FAO-	Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GATT-	General Agreement on Tariffs & Trade
IAEA-	International Atomic Energy Agency
IBRD-	International Bank for Reconstruction & Development (generally called the World Bank)
ICAO-	International Civil Aviation Organization
IDA-	International Development Association
IFC-	International Finance Corporation
ILO-	International Labour Organisation
IMCO-	Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization
IMF-	International Monetary Fund
ITU-	International Telecommunications Union
UNESCO-	United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization
UNIDO-	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WHO-	World Health Organization
WIPO-	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO-	World Meteorological Organization

SPECIALIZED ORGANIZATIONS

[illegible]